TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

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From the Annals of Classical Espionage

The U.S. Great Seal in the Service of the USSR: How the Americans were Bugged Through a Trojan Horse

By Igor Atamanenko

In 1943, on his return from the Teheran conference, Stalin placed an important task before Beria: at all costs, to penetrate the working office of the U.S. ambassador, Averell Harriman. The ensuing operation, resulting in the successful eavesdropping of the office of the head of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Moscow, became one of the classics of espionage. As the result of this operation, Stalin learned about decisions being decided over there even earlier than did the president of the United States. For eight years, the unique Soviet "bug" literally undermined the heraldic symbol of American freedom – the U.S. coat of arms – outlasting four ambassadors of the United States of America to Moscow.

Diplomatic relations between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. were established on November 16, 1933. From day one, Soviet counterintelligence agents mounted a full-scale effort to penetrate the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

In 1938, charming agents of the 2nd Department of General Directorate of State Security of the NKVD – in essence, ballerinas from the Bolshoi Theater – managed to establish intimate working relationships with a number of high-ranking American diplomats. Moreover, the vigilance of the U.S. Marines, who guarded the Embassy's premises, was

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Talking To Michael Pollan

Food: The Next Big Political Movement

By Harry Kreisler

For 20 years Michael Pollan has been writing about the places where the human and natural worlds intersect: food, agriculture, gardens, drugs and architecture. His influential books include In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto, The Omnivore's Dilemma, The Botany of Desire and most recently, Food Rules. An acerbic critic of the food industry, he was hopefully and of course vainly touted as a possible appointee in the Obama Administration.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born on Long Island in the town of Hempstead and grew up the first 5 years in Farmingdale, on the South Shore, and then in a town called Woodbury on the North Shore.

And, looking back, how do you think your parents shaped your thinking about the world?

Oh, in many ways, my parents and my grandparents. I got very serious about gardening as a young boy. I had a grandfather who had been in the produce business, and he was a passionate gardener – this is the late '60s – and he was very kind of reactionary, and there was not too much we connected on except plants. I put in a garden at our house, too, in imitation of his garden, but I didn't call it a garden. I called it a farm stand, and every time I could get six strawberries together in a Dixie cup, I'd sell them to my mother. She was the only customer.

That was one thread. Another was that I have a mom who's a terrific cook and very aware of food. My grandparents still cooked very traditional Jewish food, used duck fat, goose fat, or chicken fat to cook with. I remember stuffed cabbage, big deal special holiday food, and blintzes, and a whole range of Eastern European Jewish cooking. My mother did not cook that way. She fashioned herself more of a cosmopolitan, and she cooked every different ethnic food – sometimes French, Chinese, Italian – it was the '60s, it was that moment, you know, the World's Fair. You wanted to cook in every different kind of cuisine, and she was very good at all of them. And she didn't cook the way my grandparents did; I don't cook that way now. So, one of the things that has struck me, writing about food, is how little stability we have in our food culture in this country, that we haven't held on to the immigrant traditions. Certain ethnic groups have more than others, but Jews? I don't think to such a great extent.

It's part of the homogenization that comes with American culture.

Homogenization – and demonization in the case of traditional Jewish food. Everybody assumes that's lethal, to cook with all that animal fat, that that was too much meat, too much fat. It's all mythical, but the surgeon general didn't approve of a traditional Jewish diet for many, many years. So, I think that's part of it.

Let's talk about being a writer and being a science writer. What are the skills involved here, do you think?

I would argue that you could know too much about science to be a successful science writer. In other words, I don't have a deep background in science, and I have learned what I need to learn, article by article, book by book. I'm not far ahead of my reader. I don't take anything for granted. The jargon is weird to me too; it's deeply unfamiliar, so I think I can write about it in a way that isn't so daunt-

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constantly undermined by the NKVD's sex-bombs – attractive Russian language instructors. In the course of mass onslaughts on the hearts of Americans greedy for free "strawberry," the "gardeners" from the NKVD found out that the most protected area in the embassy was the upper floors. There were situated the offices of the political department, of military intelligence officers, cipher clerks, security officers, and, finally, the office of his Excellency, the ambassador.

The NKVD's attempts to eavesdrop on this special zone acquired a frenzied tempo, following information received in September 1941 from a NKVD agent of the 5th Department of the General Directorate of USSR State Security, nicknamed "Sergeant." According to his report, the American Air Force attaché in Moscow was a German agent, passing on intelligence information about the Soviet Union to the Germans.

On December 17, 1943, Beria reported to the Boss that a microphone of unique design had been developed and successfully tested. However, installation was stalled because of the inaccessibility of the ambassador's office. Even a big fire organized the day before – with the aid of "the swallows" who had won access to the premises – did not permit the NKVD agents to enter the embassy in the guise of firemen. Security was adamant: "The whole place can burn to the ground, but, in the name of the president of the United States, entrance to any outsiders is denied!"

After listening to what Beria had to say, Stalin reminded him that "there are no such fortresses, which cannot be taken by Bolsheviks." Then, in his usual familiar, condescending manner, he suddenly asked: "Lavrentiy, did you ever hear of the Trojan horse?" By the Trojan horse Stalin meant – and Beria understood this instantly – the production of a listening device, camouflaged under any object which, being given to Harriman, would remain in his office.

About an hour afterward, two dozen souvenirs made of wood, bone and skin had been delivered to the reception area of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs' office. Especially prominent were the large shield of a Scythian warrior, made of black alder; 6.6-ft mammoth tusks; "Ericsson" telephone equipment made of ivory, presented to Nicholas II by the Swedish king; and also a 3.3-ft high wastepaper basket made from an elephant foot.

The vigilance of the U.S. Marines, who guarded the Embassy's premises, was constantly undermined by the NKVD's sex-bombs – attractive Russian language instructors.

After examining the exhibits, Beria summoned academics Axel Berg and Abram Ioffe for consultation. Under their leadership, a team of highly qualified professionals from the operational and technical NKVD department began the development, production and testing of a unique bug, one hitherto unknown in the annals of international espionage and the acquisition of state secrets from another nation.

This device was a passive listening device: there were neither power supply, nor any electronic elements that could be detected by technology available to the experts of the time. The device resembled a tadpole with a small tail – that is, a 4- to 5-inch antenna. The tadpole part was a diaphragm that could vibrate. From an exterior source the eavesdroppers would beam powerful microwaves pointed at the hidden device, forcing the diaphragm of the "tadpole" to resonate. If someone was speaking in the room, this would alter the resonant frequency of the antenna, which would send back its signal – the conversations in the office – to a receiver, which would be situated out of line with the powerful beam.

This microphone could operate indefinitely. A powerful transmitter sitting in an apartment across the street beamed a strong continuous microwave signal at a distance around 300 meters. Reception, decoding and tape-recording of the slightly altered signals were achieved by a sensitive receiver well out of the path of the beam from the transmitter so that the transmitted and received signals would not be superimposed, thus swamping the sensitive receiver. The entire geometric figure – transmitter, device and receiver were in the form of an isosceles triangle.

Transmitter and receiver were duly installed in two separate apartments on the upper floors of residential buildings, across the street, to the left and right of the U.S. Embassy. The previous tenants were of course evicted. Liberated in this manner the communal apartments were occupied by specialists from the technical-operational department of the NKVD, operating the equipment. On the balconies facing the American Embassy, laundry continued to be hung, as it had been before, and, on Sundays, women (sergeants of the State Security) shook out rugs and blankets – thus, literally blowing dust into the eyes of the embassy's security officers.

The microphone bore the code name the "Chrysostom" ["Golden mouth"]. It should be noted that neither the technical designers nor the specific microphone manufacturers knew the intended target. All they knew is that it served the national security of the USSR.

Called for consultation, the leaders of the technical team were asked to advise on the feasibility of installing "Chrysostom" into one of the exhibits located in the office of the People's Commissar. Their instant and unanimous verdict was that the proposed souvenirs were entirely impractical as shelters for the device. They explained that the specific design features of the microphone

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required a souvenir specifically adapted to it, but not vice versa. For this reason, they insisted on the installation of a microphone simultaneously with the production of a gift.

Such a gift was duly made.

On February 4-11, 1945, the Big Three – Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill – met for the Yalta conference in the Crimea and hashed out fateful decisions on the shape of postwar Europe. Simultaneously came resolution of the fate of Lavrentiy Beria – whether he would be a marshal. Such was the indomitable will of the Boss: "Microphone in the office of ambassador – then marshal's epaulets on your shoulders, Lavrentiy!"

The stage presentation of "Chrysostom" to the American ambassador needed an appropriate setting. To this end, the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the pioneer camp "Artek" was planned on February 9. The day before, on February 8, deputy chairman of the People's Commissariat – Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov – in the presence of Stalin, handed to Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill the children's invitation to visit them on the opening day of Artek. The desire of the young pioneers to see, at their celebration, the president and the premier of their nation's allies was appropriate expression of their deep gratitude for the assistance provided to children in the USSR during the war.

The calculation of the Minor Trio – Stalin, Molotov and Beria – was based on the assumption that neither Roosevelt nor Churchill, whatever zeal they might have nourished to do so, would take this furlough from weightier duties during the already protracted Yalta Conference. Although the distance between Yalta and Artek was only 18 kilometers, during the war it required about two (!) hours to cover this distance on the bombed-out highway.

The strategists from the Minor Trio also knew that neither Edward Stettinius nor Sir Anthony Eden – the foreign ministers of the United States and Britain – would be able to leave their patrons in order to travel to the pioneer camp. Next in rank as candidates for a trip to the children's celebration in Artek could only be the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, and his colleague from the U.K., Sir Archibald John Clark Kerr. These two were unable to reassign the mission to any of their deputies, because they got direct instructions – from the lips of Roosevelt and Churchill – to visit the Russian children.

The motorcade of the cars with foreign guests, led by the huge black, German-built Horch of Lavrentiy Beria, entered the territory of Artek and slowly moved toward the brigade of "Stalin's falcons," where was to take place the encounter of ambassadors with pioneers. There was music, smiles, and – despite the winter – fresh-cut roses, delivered by military aircraft from Sukhumi. The principals were guarded by two battalions of NKVD officers camouflaged as pioneer leaders.

The orchestra struck up the "Star-Spangled Banner," and the chorus of pioneers sang it in English. Harriman broke into tears. At the same moment, four pioneers carried in an enormous wooden shield, the Great Seal of the United States of America.

At the finale of the welcoming ceremonies, Averell Harriman gave the pioneers a gift from the government of the United States – a check for $10,000. Sir Archibald Kerr – a check for 5,000 pounds. At this point, the orchestra struck up the "Star-Spangled Banner," and the chorus of pioneers sang it in English. Harriman broke into tears. At the same moment, four pioneers carried in an enormous, wooden shield, the Great Seal of the United States of America. Amid a storm of applause, the director of Artek handed to the U.S. ambassador a passport-certificate of the Great Seal, signed by the Soviet head of state Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin.

Valentin Berezhkov, Stalin's personal translator, translated the details of the certificate to the foreigners: sandalwood, boxwood, redwood, ivory palm, Persian ironwood, red and black wood, black alder – all these valuable species of wood had been used in the creation of the Great Seal.

Delighted by the gift and at a loss for words Harriman – perhaps for the first time in his commercial and diplomatic practice – said what he thought: "Where shall I place it? … Where to keep it? … I cannot take my eyes of it!"

Berezhkov, instructed the day before, said casually – his voice a murmur so Sir Archibald Kerr could not hear – "Just hang it in your office … The British will die of envy."

Thus, in February 1945, "Chrysostom," framed by the coat of arms of the United States, was safely installed on the top-secret floor of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. The NKVD operation – codenamed "the Confession" – on the eavesdropping of meetings conducted by U.S. ambassadors was successfully launched. By ambassadors? Yes! "Chrysostom" worked for eight years, surviving four ambassadors. It is noteworthy that every newly appointed head of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Moscow would order a complete makeover of the office interior inherited from his predecessor – from inkstand to the parquet on the floor. However, the only non-replaceable object in the room was the Great Seal. Its artistic perfection had a hypnotic effect on America's higher diplomats. Even the curtains on the windows and sofa and chair covers were selected to match the colors of the Soviet gift!

After it was eventually discovered in the Great Seal, the "Chrysostom" lived on. The Americans and British attempted to make copies. Work on making an analog of the Soviet "bug" by Americans was carried out in a secret laboratory in the Netherlands, under the code name "The Convenient Chair." Simultaneously, English counterintelligence conducted its own research, codenamed "Satyr."

The British advanced in research more than the Americans, but used a weaker microave beam, effective up to only 30 yards. The United States sat on their humiliating discovery for seven years. Then, in 1960, after the USSR brought down a U-2 spy plane with Gary Powers on board, Washington counterattacked, making public the Soviet listening device, which the Soviets had installed in the office of the American ambassador in Moscow.

Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, during the Organization's emergency session on the U-2 crisis, showed the Great Seal of

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the United States, opened it, and demonstrated the "Chrysostom." Later, the coat of arms and the miracle microphone were also demonstrated during the Security Council meeting. Primed by Soviet diplomats, India's envoy jokingly asked for a copy of the microphone. Lodge was embarrassed, and the Great Seal with the embedded "bug" – a shameful memento for U.S. security services – has never been exhibited since.

Currently, the "Chrysostom" is stored in the museum of the CIA in Langley. **CP**

Translated by **Alevtina Rea**.

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E**ditorial footnote**. The actual inventor of the bug was a fascinating figure. Léon Theremin, born Lev Sergeyevich Termen, born in St. Petersburg in 1896. By his mid-teens, Theremin was doing advanced work in electronics, with important missions in radio communication during World War One. By 1920, he had invented the world's first synthesizer, known as the Termenvox in the Soviet Union and as the "theremin" in the United States. He also developed an advanced television receiver in the mid-1920s.

By the 1930s, he had settled in the United States, organizing the world's first electronic concerts, and – divorcing his first wife Katya – marrying Lavinia Williams, a dancer in the American Negro Ballet. Money problems and bruising encounters with the IRS took him back, solo to the USSR in 1938, when the purges were at their height. For a while, it looked as though ongoing struggles with the IRS would have been the safer bet. Theremin was put in prison, later the Kolyma gold mines, and there were rumors of his execution. In fact, he was now in a *sharashka*, an advanced lab and design shop within the Gulag system, working alongside such famous figures as the aircraft designer Tupolev and Korolyov, father of the Soviet space program.

In the team led by his former mentor in his youth, Abram Ioffe, he invented the "Chrysostom" as well as the Buran eavesdropping system, precursor to the modern laser microphone, using a low power infrared beam to pick up the sound vibrations in glass windows, allegedly employed by Beria to spy on Stalin. Theremin supposedly kept tapes of these intercepts in his apartment. Theremin was given the Stalin prize in 1947. In later life, he toured the world with his daughter Kavina, from a third and final marriage to Maria Guschina. Keenly admired by Robert Moog, who made many Theremin instruments, he died in 1993, at the age of 97, thus outlasting his "victim," Averell Harriman, who had died in 1986 at the age of 95.

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ing. In one sense, science journalism is no different than any other kind of journalism. You find people who know the story, you interview them, you watch as much as you can, and you tell the story. A lot of journalists are intimidated because science seems so much more mystifying than politics, but it's no more mystifying than politics.

So, being able to do research is important . . .

Oh, absolutely, and history in particular. I think, if there's a failing of American journalism, and there are many, one is a disregard for history – very often in the origins of a phenomenon you discover the meaning of a phenomenon. And so, it's a perspective I always cover. I'm always very interested in digging back to find the history of whatever I'm writing about. So, even if it's a scientific subject, it's really important to understand the history behind it.

For instance, history can make us aware that the way we get our food today really goes back to the early '70s, and that the appointment of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz was a pivotal turning point.

Well, that's a great example. We all know that subsidies are part of the problem and a waste of money. And then you dig back and you realize: oh, we changed everything in the 1970s; we changed our agricultural policies. And there is a real turning point in the history of American agriculture and food, and that is when Earl Butz was appointed by President Nixon with the explicit mandate of forcing down the price of food, because we'd had this bout of food inflation. Americans took to the streets because food got so expensive in 1973. Nixon hired Earl Butz, who was very skillful in agricultural economics, and he kind of redesigned the whole system of crop support in this country in a way that stimulated farmers. We used to hold up prices, basically, and he moved from that system to subsidizing crops and encouraging farmers to overproduce, to produce as much as possible. He was the guy who said: get bigger, get out, plant fence row to fence row, move toward monocultures, just crank out that corn and soy, and he redesigned the structure of the subsidies to encourage that.

And you can date the obesity epidemic and so many problems of the American food system to those policies – they are inadvertent consequences of what was a very popular thing, which was driving down food prices. Which he did. Americans only spend 9.5 per cent of our income on food today. That's less than anybody in the history of civilization, and we have Earl Butz to thank.

In understanding food and agribusiness, politics is very important.

We're not aware of it, but food, like everything, is political. It is the biggest industry in the country; it's the most essential thing. We've had the luxury of not having to think about it for the last 30 years, thanks to Earl Butz and having all this cheap food around. But you know, if we, as a society, have to live without gasoline – which is unimaginable – we will figure out how to do it. We did it for millions of years. We've never lived without food. Food is really essential, and when you have anything that's essential, there're enormous political and economic forces that contend about how it will be organized.

In the last 30 years, we have had this kind of agricultural-industrial complex, which by some measures has worked quite well. It's kept the price of food low; it's kept the food industry healthy; it's given us a lot of power overseas – we're big food exporters – but what we're getting in touch with, I think, is that the byproducts of that system, or the unintended consequences and costs, are catching up – everything, from obesity to diabetes. Because that was a system that specifically encouraged the consumption of cheap corn sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils from soy, processed foods of all kinds, a lot of cheap meat. So, there's been a public health impact that's dramatic. That is what's bankrupting the healthcare system: the fact that half of us suffer from

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chronic diseases linked to the diet. There are $250 billion a year in costs tied to that. So, that's one set of problems.

The other set, of course, is environmental. For example, feedlots are the biggest source of pollution we have.

I mean, it's quite an accomplishment that you can go to a restaurant, eat a fast food meal, a big chunk of meat, French fries, large soda, for less than the minimum wage. In the history of humankind, that's quite an achievement, but it's come at a very high cost, and that cost, I think, is what we're getting in touch with right now.

You've suggested that part of the problem is that industrial capitalism and agro-capitalism essentially take a discovery and then find the best way to make the most money as soon as possible…

With incomplete information.

Right.

Genetically modified crops are another great example. We figured out something about genes, and we understand some connection between a gene, a protein, and a trait, and so, we figured out a couple crops where we could introduce new genes from other crops. It works, but we overlook a whole lot of complexity, which we just dismiss as static. Why is it that, when we introduce this gene, 90 per cent of the time you get a freak plant? Well, we don't really know: it has something to do with gene expression; it has something to do with junk DNA. Look, reductive science is very powerful, but it's always important to understand that you're missing some of the complexity. When you apply that reductive science, you can get into trouble because you're mistaking what you know for all there is to know. So, there's a lack of humility involved, and there is a tendency to apply these things long before we know what's working and what's not working.

A key turning point here is the Haber-Bosch process, which you've written about. Talk a little about that, because it is a major turning point in seeing synthetic fertilizer as the be-all and end-all of everything.

The great crisis of 1900s was that there wasn't enough nitrogen to feed everybody. Before then, all the nitrogen that was used in agriculture came from bacteria in the soil, fixing it. That was proving to be inadequate; crops were failing. The Haber-Bosch process is, basically, the fixing of nitrogen, synthetic nitrogen, and it was a great invention; by some estimates, 40 per cent of the people on earth are here because of that process. However, it's a great example of a powerful technology that's had a lot of negative effects. Synthetic nitrogen, when it oxidizes in the soil, becomes nitrous oxide, which is a very potent greenhouse gas. Nitrogen fertilizer became so cheap and is used with such profligacy that it runs down the Mississippi River and into the Gulf of Mexico, where it has created this dead zone. And, over time, we have found that using too much synthetic nitrogen ruins the structure of the soil; it becomes too salty and, basically, nothing will grow. And you have the declining yield curve that we've seen all through the green revolution countries, because of too much nitrogen in the fertilizer. The green revolution, for example, is the application of these technologies to the developing world: hybrid seed, fertilizer, ammonium nitrate fertilizer, and irrigation techniques, and growing in monocultures. There're a lot of very good intentions. There was a serious goal of feeding the world, but, over the long term, it's been a disaster.

There is a real turning point in the history of American agriculture and food, and that is when Earl Butz was appointed by President Nixon with the explicit mandate of forcing down the price of food, because we'd had this bout of food inflation.

Journalism could play a more aggressive role in assessing these things, but, in the end, journalism reflects the political culture of a country. One of the reasons we didn't have a debate about genetically modified crops before we introduced them in this country is because both the Republicans and the Democrats supported Monsanto and GMO technology, and, when both political parties are on the same side, there's no space for journalists to operate. When you're introducing technologies, you need a public discussion, and you need to think through what are the benefits and what are the risks. And that must be decided publicly, not privately.

I think a lot of our problems is that we assume all technologies are innocent until proven guilty, in this country especially. We're technological utopians, and we think you're a party pooper if you raise questions about genetically modified crops. There's a lot of money and potential in it, a lot of interesting intellectual property for a lot of people, and you're a Luddite if you raise any kinds of questions. And then, 40-50 years later, we deal with the possible impacts. It's not to say that synthetic fertilizer was something we should not have done, but had we applied more of a precautionary science to it, we might have anticipated some of the problems and been able to mitigate them before they got too serious. So, I think it's a society problem.

You've written about nutritionism as a kind of ideology that purports to be a science – tell us more about that.

We've adopted the reductive language of nutrition from the scientists: we all talk about saturated fats, high fructose corn syrup. It's fascinating to listen to Americans talk about food today. They sound like a bunch of amateur scientists. They don't talk about foods; they talk about nutrients. It's bizarre when you think about it, and it's been a fascinating phenomenon to watch.

"Nutritionism" is an ideology about food that has four basic principles. The first is: foods don't matter, nutrients do. A food is essentially the sum of its nutrient parts, and a given food, such as steak, is a vehicle for carrying protein and saturated fat, because that's what matters.

The second principle is that you can divide the world into good and bad nutrients. There's always an evil nutrient that we're trying to rid from the food supply – transfats, high fructose corn syrup, or saturated fat; and on the other side is a blessed nutrient: if you could just get enough of that, you'll be fine, you'll live forever. And that, of course, was fiber for a long time; now it's antioxidants or omega-3 fatty acids.

A third principle is: if the important thing in food is a nutrient, and nutrients are invisible to normal people, then you need experts to tell you how to eat.

And the fourth principle of nutritionism is that the whole point of eating is

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health. You're either ruining your health or you're improving your health with every meal. And that's a kind of bizarre view of food. I mean, people eat for a great many other reasons.

So, I think we've lost our sense of food; we've lost our sense of eating as a complex social, as well as biological, phenomenon, involving community and identity and pleasure. All these categories have vanished under this regime of nutritionism. My last book is kind of a manifesto against nutritionism and in favor of returning food to the center of our discussion about food and making health a by-product of a happy relationship to food, rather than the goal of eating.

And that takes you back to the culture of food that you might have found at your grandparents' table, I think.

You're right. We've essentially displaced culture as a guide in telling us what to eat and put science in its place. We think cultural wisdom about food is just old wives' tales; if your grandmother thought it was true – I mean, what did she know? We have scientists now who can tell us all about antioxidants.

Yet, the grandmothers were right about a lot of things. I was on a call-in show in Australia recently, and a woman called and said, "My grandmother used to always say, eat your colors." Now, that's a very interesting rule. We now know that the important plant chemicals all have a different color, and, indeed, eating different colored foods is a guarantee that you are getting the diversity of antioxidants and phytochemicals you need to be healthy. How did that grandmother know that? This was before we knew what an antioxidant was.

So, my premise in this book is that culture still has a lot to teach us about food, and, indeed, it is still wiser about food than science. I have enormous respect for nutrition science, and I hope that someday they'll figure it out, but they haven't yet. Nutrition science is approximately where surgery was in the year 1650.

We would do well to tune down that whole debate about fats and carbs that you read in the media, and not put so much stock in the latest nutritional finding, because it will be contradicted by the next nutritional finding, and to return to the cultural wisdom about how to eat, which guided people very well for a very long time.

You write about creating your own garden, [which] is a source for you not only of the subjects of interest but also of the values that drive your perception of the world. In that discussion, you also make a distinction between a gardener and a naturalist. Talk a little about that, because you seem to be suggesting that to see things whole, you have to be whole yourself, and gardening is a way to get there.

I think that's right. Look, a lot of my work grows out of my experience in the garden. My first book, called *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, was really an attempt to use what I was doing and experiencing in the garden as a place to explore our relationship to the natural world.

We've adopted the reductive language of nutrition from the scientists: we all talk about saturated fats, high fructose corn syrup. It's fascinating to listen to Americans talk about food today. They sound like a bunch of amateur scientists. They don't talk about foods; they talk about nutrients.

Traditionally in America, if you wanted to explore your relationship to nature, you'd go to the wilderness, you'd do the Thoreau thing, the Emerson thing, the Melville thing. You have your confrontation with wild nature, and that's essential and authentic and a beautiful discussion, and it's given us things like the wilderness park, an American cultural invention, the idea of preserving a wild place that for most of history was regarded as wastelands and ugly landscapes. We learned how to appreciate them, and we've elevated them, and we've saved them.

But that whole discussion – and that worship of wilderness – doesn't help you with many other questions, or with the 92 per cent of the American landscape you can't lock up. There are so many places where we need to engage with nature without destroying it, but we also can't just leave it alone. And the garden, in a way, is the great symbol of that place.

It's a place where we mix ourselves up with nature, where we are in this reciprocal relationship with other species affecting us, and we're affecting them, and it's a beautiful place, ideally. There is conflict, though: there are weeds; there are bugs. You can't get away from that, for merely sitting back and worshiping it will give you a disastrous garden and no crop.

So, I began then, with that very first book, getting interested in that messy place between the human world and the wild, and trying to figure out how to behave in that world in a way that I could get what I wanted while also not destroying or diminishing nature. Food is another one of those messy places. I think that the garden is a really important model and that, if we would let the garden guide us in our dealings with the natural world – and by that, I mean agriculture, architecture, design – I think, we would be better off.

How has agribusiness failed to consider this?

Basically, it's pushed too hard on the culture side of that dialectic and not appreciated that nature can't be bent to our will completely. Agribusiness essentially conceives of a farm or a garden as a factory: you put in these inputs – fertilizer, irrigation water, hybrid seed, pesticide – and you get out those outputs, and nature is just the factory floor.

That doesn't work because nature has its own interests. Nature pushes back. Nature is an obstacle to certain things we want to do, so that you need to think more like a gardener than a factory manager. When you do that, you find that there are ways to grow food of incredible quality, beauty, and healthfulness, while nature goes about getting what she needs. And that's really the challenge of good farming, figuring out a nonzero sum way. Most of our farming is like mining: we extract from the earth, we extract nutrients from the soil, we diminish the land the longer we farm it. So, is there a way we can get what we want from nature and leave nature not just undiminished but actually improved?

The garden shows that yes, that's possible. You have to know a lot: you have to know about ecology, entomology, soil science, but we have models. I've been on farms that are doing that right now. So, that's really the challenge – to bring the wisdom of the gardener to these larger

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arenas like the farm.

And you say, I think, at one point that a gardener is a citizen, a producer, and a consumer. You're suggesting that a food movement can bring a new kind of politics that might change this whole system.

So much of the agriculture and food system we have is the result of policy. Fast food, as Eric Schlosser brilliantly showed in his book, *Fast Food Nation*, is not just the result of the free market doing its thing; it's the result of specific policies, sometimes well intentioned, sometimes not. We have this monoculture diet that's based heavily on corn and soy processed into all these different products; that's the result of a set of agricultural policies.

So, it stands to reason that another set of agricultural policies could give you a different kind of diet, different kinds of health outcomes as well. That's really the challenge before this food movement, to come up with policy ideas that will stimulate another kind of agriculture and also rebuild these local food economies, which have so many virtues.

So, the food movement has many faces to it: there're people who are working on school lunch, people working on community food security in the inner city, and people working on changing the farm, and farm to hospital movements. It's a very big, inchoate movement that is just starting to gel and be felt, I think, at the national level. It's kind of where environmentalism was in the '60s, around the time of Earth Day, where there was this incredible sense of the importance of this issue, people in the streets, people very excited about it, yet it was not that well organized. Thirty years later, there are cadres of policy makers and lawyers that are ready, under the new administration, to go into the EPA, go into the Interior Department, and they know what to do with those levers of power. We're not quite there with the food movement yet, but we'll be there, and it won't take 30 years.

How do you answer the contention that the food movement is for the affluent and not for the rest?

The criticism that it's elitist is a serious one, and I think that there are ways in which the food movement has been guilty of that. It is true that healthy, fresh, seasonal, nutritious food is more expensive than conventional food and, therefore, has tended to be enjoyed by the affluent more than others, but you have to look at why that is. One reason is that we, of course, subsidize the other kind of food. The cheap food in the market tends to be industrial food. It doesn't have to be that way. It just happens to be that way because of policy.

There're large segments of the movement as well that have focused on the inner city: the community food security movement, the school lunch movement, the kind of work that Alice Waters is doing in the schools in Berkeley. If you've ever been in a Berkeley public school, you know that's a highly diversified society; it's not affluent. And reaching people

There's always an evil nutrient that we're trying to rid from the food supply – transfats, high fructose corn syrup, or saturated fat; and on the other side is a blessed nutrient: if you could just get enough of that, you'll be fine, you'll live forever.

at lunchtime, you're reaching everybody; that's not an elitist politics, to be reforming school lunch. So, it's definitely an issue, and the movement needs to do a better job of addressing it, but we're very aware of it.

You wrote in the New York Times Magazine *a memo to the "First Farmer", President Obama – before he was elected – suggesting that the present financial crisis presents an opportunity and a challenge for action. You laid out an agenda demonstrating the interconnection between the energy and health problems that he clearly wants to address, and what you see as the agribusiness problems, which aren't as widely perceived. What has to be done and what can be done in this present situation where there're just so many crises?*

These crises are linked, and I think that that's important. I wrote this article during the campaign, when nobody was talking about food. My point was that whoever is elected president, if they are serious about addressing climate change and about addressing healthcare costs, they will find themselves dealing with the food issue, because food is the shadow issue over all those other issues, and energy independence as well. Our food system is heavily reliant on fossil fuel. The genius of industrial agriculture has been to replace human labor in the fields, and, in the processing of food, with fossil fuel, with the result that a fifth of our fuel consumption goes to agriculture and the food system overall. As I said earlier, a third of the greenhouse gases come out of this system. So, you're not going to deal with climate change unless you deal with agriculture. You could get the transportation system green, the power grid green, but if you're still growing food the same way, you're going to have a tremendous problem with climate change.

And you could nationalize healthcare, but the cost will bankrupt the system unless you get a handle on chronic disease – which is to say, unless you deal with the catastrophe that is the American diet, and that diet is linked to that agriculture. If you can fix the American food system, you will have so many benefits: you will cut down on healthcare costs, you will

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cut down on greenhouse gases. I think connecting the food issue to those other issues has raised its visibility in the debate. I sense that it's being taken more seriously in the media, more seriously in the councils of government, and that's a good thing. Whether President Obama is ready to go to war with agribusiness – I don't see much sign of that, and it's probably premature to expect him to do that – but there's a lot he can do, and there's a lot we can do too.

We need to build this movement and make it bigger and create those cadres of policy makers and politicos to really drive change, because, make no mistake, the agricultural-industrial complex is very powerful. Harry Reid said recently that the two best organized lobbies on the Hill are insurance and the commodity groups, by which he means the corn and soy people and the grain traders, that whole group. They're really well organized. They don't have large numbers of people, but they have got a lot of power. And you don't hear about them much.

I offered in this article changes at all different levels. I think, you have to change the general incentives that are codified in the subsidies to encourage farmers to use less fossil fuel and more solar energy, and you do that through diversification. I talked about decentralizing the farm and the food economy, but I also talked about the bully pulpit. These are things the president can do without any approval from Congress, such as putting a garden, as Michele Obama has done, on the White House lawn. This can be an eloquent statement of the fact that, look, the sun still shines, there is abundance. Imagine a White House that was actually feeding the poor of Washington, as well as feeding itself. It would send a very important signal. So, I don't think that those things are trivial. I think that how the White House organizes its own household around food, the kind of food choices that are made in the White House, can set the tone, elevate the issue, because the more the public pays attention to this issue of food, the less tolerable the current policies will be.

How would you advise the next generation to prepare for this kind of food culture that we've been talking about? Obviously, start a garden…

That's not a bad thing. I mean, you learn a lot in a garden.

Get out of the supermarket, shop at the farmers' market, vote with your fork essentially. We get three votes a day when it comes to food, and those votes, we have seen, have an enormous impact on the world. How you choose to spend your food dollars is a very important vote that you have, and so, think about how you cast it and realize that, yeah, you may spend a few extra pennies or dollars for that local food, but you're accomplishing a lot. You're keeping farmers in your community, farmland open in your area, you're building redundancy into the food system, not to mention you're getting the healthiest, tastiest, freshest food you can get. And cook. That is one other very important thing. Learn how to cook because, when you cook, you will be supporting local food and you'll be a lot healthier too. **CP**

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